



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Turn Your Name into Your Brand

by Melanie J. Davis

Donald Trump may not be charming when he aggressively proclaims his own greatness, but he makes it impossible to forget him. Indeed, when most of us hear his name, we probably think of one of his commercial properties because, simply put, Trump has brand recognition.

The name Trump is linked with real estate development just as Kleenex is linked with facial tissue. Being a brand is beneficial in business because it means people remember your name and what you're selling—even if what you're selling is your expertise rather than a product.

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as “a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.” Brand recognition is the Holy Grail of marketing. When your name is recognized, people have remembered you for your expertise, your client service, your integrity; in short, they remember you for having something they need and respect.

In his book, *The Revenge of Brand X*, Rob Frankel wrote: “Branding is not about getting your prospects to choose you over the competition. It's about getting your prospects to see you as the only solution to their problem.”

Creating your own brand takes some finesse because most people can't successfully emulate Trump's larger-than-life nature. In trying, they turn off the very clients and contacts they want to impress. Their personalities become increasingly bloated with each boast until they are as attractive as puffed up, poisonous fugu fish.

The challenge then, is to be memorable without being egotistical. People do business with professionals with whom they are familiar and in whom they have confidence: a weak Trump imitation won't accomplish either goal. The solution is to communicate effectively and often,

so that when people hear or see your name, they are reminded of your strengths, your professionalism and your ability to solve their problems. In other words, you need to interact with them successfully until your name becomes a highly respected brand.

The most important aspect of branding is quality: yours. If you aren't at the top of your professional game, invest in improving your performance before you invest in marketing. Then, focus on efforts that will enable you to personally interact with your clients and potential clients, such as:

- Provide excellent customer service – Without it, you'll undo all the other efforts you put into marketing. Give clients more than they expect, including your undivided attention during consultations and phone calls.
- Follow-up – A few days after a meeting or consultation, call your client to see if you can answer any questions that may have arisen. Clients will remember the extra effort you've made.
- Keep clients warm – If you haven't spoken to a client in a while, reach out. The main reason people seek new vendors is because they feel ignored. Make them feel appreciated, and they'll repay you.
- Network – Getting to know people one-on-one is the key to building relationships, and the people with whom you have good relationships will create a positive buzz about you.
- Share your expertise – Public speaking enhances your credibility. Start by talking to a small group of fellow professionals. As you get more comfortable, speak to larger groups of people. Enhance your brand by creating useful handouts or manuals with

(continued on bottom of next page)



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...Getting to know
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So What Do You Do?

by Mark E. Green

Editor's Note: No accountants, labor attorneys or morticians were harmed in the writing of this article.

Most of us aren't very effective at describing what we do for a living. This is particularly problematic if your professional responsibilities include selling, (note to business owners and consultants: this includes you). To be fair, part of the problem is in the question we're usually answering—"What do you do?" but it's also in how we choose to answer it.

Humans have a need for order that drives us to classify the world around us. We have "good" friends, we know doctors, your next-door neighbor is a firefighter, your father is a former marine—you get the picture. In fact, we've been conditioned to classify people and we do it through some basic questions. "Where do you live?" "Where did you go to

school?" And, of course, the question of the moment here is—"So what do you do?" We believe that the answers to these questions tell us more than meets the eye—information about social status, economic status, points of view and more. What we're really asking for is help; help making sure that we classify the other person correctly.

The flip side of this is that we've been conditioned to help others classify us, so we can be assured that we wind up in the right bin in their minds. This is why we so readily answer these types of questions with the expected, brief instant-messenger-type responses. "I live on the West Side." "I attended Notre Dame." "I am an actuary."

Somewhat nefariously, and just as we were conditioned, we do our best to pass more of the same to the next generation. For example,

(continued on page 18)



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Turn Your Name into Your Brand • from page 8

your name and contact information prominently displayed.

Other marketing communications tools—newsletters, Web sites, advertising and public relations—are also very important and should be part of a carefully crafted marketing plan.

You may never achieve brand recognition akin to Donald Trump's, but then again, his level of fame is not necessarily your goal.

Concentrate on building your professional quality and brand, and you'll reap more realistic, but equally impressive, rewards. □

